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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable BEN SASSE, a Senator from the State of Nebraska.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Father, teach us how to praise You at all times, constantly glorifying Your Name and expressing gratitude for Your prevailing providence.

Lord, thank You for sustaining our lawmakers as they strive to fulfill Your purposes for our Nation and world. Set them free from all fears, reminding them that You have been their help in the past and should be their hope for the years to come.

Forgive us all for duties unperformed, promptings disobeyed, and beckonings ignored.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

The bill clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 20, 2018.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable BEN SASSE, a Senator

from the State of Nebraska, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

Mr. SASSE thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

TRIBUTE TO OKSANA MASTERS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, during Sunday's closing ceremonies at the Pyeongchang Paralympics, the American flag was held high by a special member of Team USA. Oksana Masters of Louisville, KY, was elected by her teammates to represent our Nation at the ceremonies, capping off her remarkable trip.

Born in Chernobyl with radiation poisoning, Oksana was adopted at the age of 7 and came to the United States. She underwent a number of medical procedures at a young age, including the amputation of both of her legs, but that didn't stop her. Regardless of the obstacle, she pushed through.

This year marks her fourth Paralympics. She entered Pyeongchang with a silver and two bronze medals, but this time, this talented multisport athlete set her sights on the gold, and I am happy to report that Oksana, once again, achieved her goal. She ascended to the top of the podium, not once but twice.

Kentucky is very proud of Oksana and all that she has accomplished. She is a fine representative of our Commonwealth and our Nation.

ALLOW STATES AND VICTIMS TO FIGHT ONLINE SEX TRAFFICKING BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on a totally different matter, the Senate continues to consider a bill that would strike back against the evils of sex trafficking. The topic is all too familiar to me and many of my colleagues who have fought against child exploitation for decades. In recent years, as trafficking has migrated from street corners to smartphones, reports of child sex trafficking have ticked up dramatically.

My friend and colleague from Ohio, Senator PORTMAN, has been especially committed to rooting out the cause of this crisis. He has built a broad bipartisan coalition in support of the legislation currently before the Senate. It is designed to close a loophole in existing law that allows websites to avoid responsibility, even as they knowingly facilitate trafficking. It would ensure that any institutions that are party to this reprehensible practice are subject to strict penalties—the ones they deserve.

I urge each of my colleagues to join us in taking decisive action for our Nation's children.

YEMEN RESOLUTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, later today the Senate will vote on a resolution offered by the junior Senators from Vermont and Utah. Their goal is to end U.S. support for the Saudi Arabian-led coalition fighting the Houthi insurgency in Yemen, and they propose to do this using provisions of the War Powers Resolution and the International Security Assistance and Arms Export Control Act.

I oppose their resolution for two reasons. The first reason is that my colleagues' substantive policy aim is actually misguided. Supreme Leader Khamenei and his regime know what

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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their goals are: Preserving their rule, expanding Iranian hegemony across the region, and harming the United States and Israel. That is what they want to do. That is why Iran exports violence, intimidation, and coercion. That is why Iran expands its ballistic missile program. That is why Iran uses proxies, such as the Houthis, Hezbollah, and other Shia militias, along with cyber attacks and other terrorism, to meddle in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain, and beyond.

During the Obama administration, America drew down our forward-deployed military and conventional force structure. We chased after a flawed nuclear agreement. We reduced our commitment to our Sunni Arab partners. Iran noticed our reticence and saw an opportunity. It expanded its support of proxies and built strategies to exploit the unrest following civil wars in Yemen and Syria and the rampage of ISIL into Iraq.

If this meddling is to be confronted, if terrorist threats are to be countered, and if arms shipments are to be curtailed, the United States will need the help of our regional partners. One key partner is Saudi Arabia. We have shared common interests for decades. We have worked together to counter Iran, support the Free Syrian Army, and combat ISIL. Today the support the United States provides to the Saudi-led coalition, including aerial refueling over the Red Sea, contributes to greater precision in their air campaign and actually leads to fewer civilian casualties. So let me say that again: Withdrawing U.S. support would increase, not decrease, the risk of civilian casualties, and it would signal that we are not serious about containing Iran or its proxies. The Houthi presence would continue threatening shipping lanes in the Red Sea. Iranian missiles would continue threatening Riyadh, and Iran would be further emboldened. That is why the goal of this resolution is bad policy.

But my colleagues' resolution is also procedurally mistaken. The expedited authorities they wish to draw upon are meant for removing U.S. forces from actual participation in hostilities, but our support for the Saudi coalition has not caused us to enter active warfare or hostilities in Yemen.

The Department of Defense and Secretary Mattis have made clear that U.S. forces are not engaged in exchanges of fire with hostile forces. According to the Acting General Counsel of the Department of Defense: "The limited military and intelligence support that the United States is providing to the [KSA-led] coalition does not involve any introduction of U.S. forces into hostilities for purposes of the War Powers Resolution or of section 1013 of the Department of State Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1984 and 1985."

I support that assessment. The refueling of aircraft over the Red Sea does not equate to introducing U.S.

forces into hostilities nor does intelligence sharing. U.S. forces are not transporting Saudi forces into combat within Yemen by air, land, or sea. So the expedited procedures this resolution seeks to exploit simply do not apply here.

If Senators disagree with my assessment of the merits and oppose our support for the coalition, they have several legislative tools available to them. They could try to restrict funds through the appropriations process, amend the Arms Control Export Act for the licensing of defense services or the National Defense Authorization Act. Instead, we face a resolution which purports to require the President to withdraw U.S. forces from hostilities in Yemen—hostilities which we have not entered.

In a recent speech, Secretary Mattis explained:

History proves that nations with allies thrive. . . . Working by, with and through allies who carry their equitable share allows us to amass the greatest possible strength.

Imagine how challenging that would become if every advise-and-assist mission our forces undertake around the globe becomes subject to misapplication of the War Powers Resolution.

Thus, I oppose this resolution on grounds of policy and on grounds of procedure, and I urge our colleagues to join me this afternoon.

OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on a final matter, later this week, the Senate will consider an omnibus spending package to address a number of critical priorities, from rebuilding America's infrastructure to fighting the opioid epidemic. In particular, building on the funding agreement passed in February, the measure will deliver the resources and certainty that America's military deserves. To be specific, this legislation will provide the largest year-on-year increase in defense funding in 15 years. After years of disproportionate cuts to our armed services, Congress has begun to provide adequate resources to put an end to the harmful decline in combat readiness, to fulfill our commitments to American families who sacrifice through service—many of them in my home State of Kentucky.

For our men and women in uniform, this means a well-deserved pay raise. For our veterans back home, it means increased oversight and modernization in the Veterans' Administration care system, thanks to a record level of VA funding. Our warriors on the frontline deserve to be trained to the highest standards, as do the units that replace them. Now our commanders can work to restore combat readiness—and not a moment too soon. Threats around the world are only growing in number and intensity. By strengthening our investment in missile defense, by funding new weapons systems, by scaling up

shipbuilding and aircraft procurement, and by investing in our all-volunteer servicemembers, we will send a strong message to our allies and our foes alike that America's military is regaining dominance.

This week, my colleagues will have the opportunity to follow through and address the pressing needs of the defense community. I hope each of them will join me in voting to swiftly pass the omnibus, thus giving our Armed Forces the resources they need and deserve.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, while the Senate conducts an important debate today on Yemen, we continue to negotiate an omnibus spending bill. It will follow through on the bipartisan budget deal we struck in February that, for the first time in a long time, will robustly fund our military and provide substantial investment in our middle class.

For too long, the arbitrary and pointless sequester caps held back Federal investment in jobs, scientific research, healthcare, and education. They also handicapped our military and prevented long-term planning at the Pentagon. The budget deal paved the way to do away with the harmful sequester caps, and now the omnibus will put the nail in the coffin.

Negotiations continue between the four leaders. A few sticking points remain but we are very close to signing off on legislation that both Houses will be able to take up and pass by the end of the week.

Mr. President, on the omni, I agree with the leader. Hopefully, we can come to an agreement and pass it this week. It has some things no one likes, and it has a lot of things not everybody likes but most people like. The basic structure of it was a fair compromise, and, hopefully, we can come to an agreement. Our staffs are working really hard.

PUERTO RICO AND U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS HURRICANE RECOVERY EFFORT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I would like to say a word about Puerto Rico. Today marks the sixth anniversary of Hurricane Maria's landfall on the island—the 6-month anniversary. We all know that the storm in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands was one of the most powerful and devastating ever to have struck those islands. There was terrible damage to schools, hospitals, water systems, roads, homes, and businesses.